PLATO'S MENEXENUS

234a ***Socrates***. From the agora[1] or from where, Menexenus?[2]

Menexenus. From the agora, Socrates, and from the council-chamber.

Socrates. What in particular drew you to the council-chamber? Or is it clear that you believe you have come to the end of education and philosophy, and, supposing yourself sufficiently prepared, you intend to turn to greater things? Will you try at such a young
b age, wondrous one, to rule us, your elders, so that your house will never cease to provide us with a caretaker?

Menexenus. If you, Socrates, permit and advise me to rule, I'll be eager; but if not, I won't. In this instance, however, I went to the council-chamber since I had learned that the Council was about to choose the one who will speak over those who have died. For you know that they intend to hold a funeral.

Socrates. Certainly. But whom did they choose?

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1 The *agora* was the civic center of Athens, situated between the Acropolis and the main city gate. Countless examples in ancient Greek literature attest to its importance to community life in Athens. The council-chamber (*boulesterion*), mentioned in the next line, was where the council of Athens met daily to perform the deliberative, administrative, and judicial functions of government necessary for implementing the policies of the assembly.

2 It is clear from this dialogue alone that Socrates and Menexenus are friends. But Menexenus is also named in the *Phaedo* (59b) among those companions who attended Socrates at his death. In a younger incarnation, he is one of the two main interlocutors in the *Lysis*, Plato's dialogue on friendship. Even at his young age in the *Lysis*, he appears to be acquainted with Socrates, perhaps through his cousin Ctesippus (207a-b). In the *Menexenus* itself, Menexenus must be around the age of eighteen since he is represented as about to take up the political duties and privileges of an Athenian citizen.

Menexenus. No one. They put it off until tomorrow. I expect, though, that Archinus or Dion will be chosen.[3]

c ***Socrates***. Indeed, Menexenus, dying in war seems in many ways to be noble.[4] For even if the one who has died[5] was poor, he receives a fine and magnificent funeral, and even if he was worthless, he receives praise from wise men who do not praise at random but prepare speeches long beforehand. These men praise so beautifully that by giving each man qualities he actually possessed and even some he didn't, going to every length to most beautifully
235a embellish with their words, they bewitch our souls. They pay every manner of tribute to the city, to those who have died in war, and to all our earlier ancestors. And they even praise us, the living, such that I for my part, Menexenus, feel altogether
b elevated by their praises.[6] Each time, as I listen and am charmed, I am altered, believing that I've become at that moment greater, more dignified, and more beautiful. Often some foreigners follow along and listen with me, and in their eyes too I become instantly more majestic. And indeed, it seems to me that they, having been seduced by the speaker, feel the same things towards the rest of the

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3 Archinus was an important political figure during the re-establishment of democracy in Athens in 403 B.C. There are three political actions for which he is chiefly remembered. He intentionally prevented the oligarchs from emigrating to Eleusis (a haven for disaffected oligarchs); he vehemently and successfully resisted Thrasybulus' suggestion that Athenian citizenship be extended to all those who contributed to the re-establishment of democracy; and he sentenced to death the first man who violated the amnesty guaranteed to those who were involved in the oligarchy. See John V. A. Fine, *The Ancient Greeks: A Critical History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1983), pp. 523-525; George Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 8, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1855) pp. 267-276. Dion the Athenian is mentioned by Xenophon as one of the Athenian ambassadors sent in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate with the Persians in 392 B.C. (*Hellenica* IV.7.13).

4 On *kalos*, "noble," see note 2 to preceding translation of Pericles' Funeral Oration. In this translation, we generally render *kalos* as "noble," with a few exceptions when we use "beautiful" or "fine."

5 The Greek verb *apothneiskein* means simply "to die off." It does not carry the same range of meaning, nor the gentle euphemism, of *teleutan* which means "to bring to an end" in the sense of completion, accomplishment, or fulfillment. This use of *apothneiskein* is more the exception than the rule in Socrates' speech. *Apothneiskein* is used only at 234b and 234c; *teleutan* and related terms, by contrast, are used at 234c, 235a, 236d, 236e, 237a, 238c, 242e, 244a, 246a, 246d, 248b, c, d, e, 249b and c.

6 We translate here the adverbial form of the Greek term *gennaios*, which most precisely means "nobly born," as "elevated" and its comparative in the next sentence as "more dignified," in order to distinguish it from the instances of *kalos*.

city as they feel towards me, believing her to be more wondrous than before. This sense of majesty stays with me for more than
c three days. The speech is so fresh and the speaker's voice so rings in my ears that scarcely on the fourth or fifth day do I remember who I am and notice that I am of this earth—in the meantime I almost believe that I live on the Isles of the Blessed.[7] Such is the cleverness of our rhetoricians.

Menexenus. You are always making fun of the rhetoricians, Socrates. In this instance, to be sure, I expect that the one they choose won't do so well, for the whole selection has arisen on the spur of the moment so that the speaker may well be forced to speak virtually off-hand.

d ***Socrates***. How so, good fellow? Each of them have speeches already prepared, and in any event it is not hard to speak off-hand in such situations. Now, if one should have to speak well of Athenians before Peloponnesians, or of Peloponnesians before Athenians, then one would have to be a good rhetorician to persuade and win esteem. But when someone competes before the very ones he is praising, it is no great thing to seem to speak well.

e ***Menexenus***. You don't think so, Socrates?

Socrates. Certainly not, by Zeus.

Menexenus. Do you think that you yourself would be able to speak, if you should have to and the Council should choose you?

Socrates. That I would be able to speak, Menexenus, is nothing wondrous. For I happen to have a teacher who is not at all bad in rhetoric, but who has produced, in addition to many other great rhetoricians, the one who is preeminent among the Greeks—Pericles, son of Xanthippus.

Menexenus. Who is this teacher? Or is it clear that you mean Aspasia?[8]

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7 The "Isles of the Blessed" are mentioned twice in Book Seven of Plato's *Republic* (519c, 540b).

8 Aspasia was best known as a courtesan, and as a result of her infamous relation with Pericles, she was often blamed by the comedians for interfering in Athens' political affairs (see especially Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 523-532). In his life of Pericles, Plutarch indicates that the reference to Aspasia in the *Menexenus* is a joke, but he observes that we may take as true the claim that Aspasia had much skill in the art of speaking, so much so that several Athenians came to her for instruction (Plutarch, *Lives*, translated by John Dryden [New York: Modern Library, 1932], p. 200); See also Louis Méridier, ed. *Platon Oeuvres Complètes*, tome 5 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1931) pp. 78-79, Paul Friedländer, *Plato II: The Dialogues*, translated by Hans Meyerhoff (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) pp. 219-220.

Socrates. Yes, her, and Connus, son of Metrobius. These two are
236a my teachers, he of music, and she of rhetoric. So it is nothing wondrous that a man trained in this way should be clever at speaking. Even someone who has been educated worse than I—in music by Lamprus, in rhetoric by Antiphon of Rhamnusia[9]—could still win esteem when praising Athenians before Athenians.

Menexenus. And what would you have to say, if you should have to speak?

Socrates. Of my own, perhaps nothing. But just yesterday I heard
b Aspasia going through a funeral speech for these same dead. For she had heard what you mention, that the Athenians were about to choose the one who will speak. So she narrated for me the sort of things that ought to be said; some of these she came up with on the spur of the moment, and others she had previously prepared by gluing together leftovers from the time when, I believe, she was composing the funeral speech Pericles delivered.

Menexenus. And can you remember what Aspasia said?

Socrates. I'd be unjust if I couldn't. After all, I learned it from her,
c and I almost caught a beating whenever I forgot something.

Menexenus. Why don't you narrate it now then?

Socrates. But I fear that my teacher will be angry with me if I divulge her speech.

Menexenus. Never mind that, Socrates, just speak and you will gratify me greatly. Whether you wish to give Aspasia's speech or whomever's, just speak.

Socrates. But perhaps you'll laugh at me if in my old age I seem to you still to be playing.

Menexenus. Not at all, Socrates. But by all means, speak.

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[9] Antiphon was a famous Attic rhetorician and teacher of rhetoric. A book of oratorical exercises, the *Tetralogies*, is accredited to him and is considered the foundation for the genre of Attic rhetoric (Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.,* 3rd ed., [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], p. 432). He was the intellectual leader of the oligarchic conspiracy in 411 B.C., and was tried and executed after the fall of the Four Hundred (Hammond, *A History of Greece,* p. 406; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 6, pp. 15-17, 26-38, 74-77). The only public speech he is known to have given was at his own trial. Thucydides records that it was the finest speech of its kind ever heard (Thucydides VIII.68), but it was unsuccessful nonetheless. Lamprus, according to Athenaeus, was Sophocles' instructor in music and dance (*Deinosophists* 20f). By his contemporary, the tragic poet Phrynicus, Lamprus was considered to be a charlatan (*Deinosophists* 44d; C.E. Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato*, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1935) p. 91.

Socrates. Well, I guess I must gratify you, seeing as how, since
d we are alone, I'd very nearly gratify you even if you were to urge me to dance naked. But listen. For starting with the ones who themselves had died, she spoke, I believe, as follows:

With respect to deeds, these men have received from us what befits them, for they depart on the destined journey having been sent forth as a group by the city and individually by their families. But as for speech, the law enjoins us to give these men the honor
e still due, and it is proper that we do so. For when deeds have been well performed, a finely delivered speech can instill in the listeners remembrance and honor for those who have done the deeds. Such a speech must adequately praise those who have died and graciously counsel those who are living, urging children and brothers to imitate the virtue of the ones who lie before them, and consoling fathers, mothers, and any other surviving ancestors.
237a How can we find such a speech? Where would we rightly begin to praise good men, who in life pleased those around them by their virtue and who died in exchange for the safety of the living? It seems to me that as they were good, one ought naturally to praise them as such. But they were good because they grew from the good. Let us pay tribute first, then, to their good birth, and,
b second, to their nurture and education; after this, let us describe the performance of their deeds, how noble and worthy a display they made of them.

To begin with, the basis of their good birth is that their ancestors were not born in a foreign land, and thus they, the descendants, did not migrate to this country, with ancestors from elsewhere. No, they were autochthonous, living and dwelling in their true fatherland, nurtured not by a stepmother as others are but by a mother, the country in which they lived. And now in death, they
c lie in their familial places in the country that bore, nurtured, and has received them back again. It is therefore most just to honor first their mother herself, as this will be to honor at the same time the goodness of their birth.

Our country is worthy of praise not only from us but from all mankind. There are many reasons for this, but the first and greatest is that she happens to be loved by the gods. Witness to our claim is the strife and quarrel of the gods who disputed over her.[10] She

[10] According to legend, Poseidon and Athena contended over the possession of Athens. Each gave the Athenians a gift: Poseidon, a well of sea-water;

d whom gods praised, how could it not be just that she be praised by all of humanity?

Second, it is just that she be praised because in the time when the whole earth was producing and begetting the many animals, wild and tame, our own land proved to be pure, barren of the wild and savage; from among the animals, she chose for herself and bore man, who surpasses the rest in understanding and
e alone recognizes justice and the gods. There is great proof for this claim that our land bore our ancestors, the ancestors we share with the men now lying before us. For each thing that bears has
238a the appropriate nourishment for that which it bears, and by this it is clear whether a woman has truly given birth. If she has not, but has substituted a child in place of having her own, she lacks sources of nourishment for the child. And indeed, our own land, our mother, provides adequate proof that she brought forth human beings. For in that time she alone first brought forth human nourishment, the fruit of wheat and barley, by which the human race is most finely and excellently nourished, since this in fact was the animal she bore. It is more fitting, too, to accept such a proof on behalf of the land than on behalf of a woman, for the land has not imitated woman in pregnancy and birth, but woman, land. And she did not horde these fruits but distributed them to others as well.[11] After this, she brought forth for her descendants the olive, a balm for the pains of labor. And having nurtured and
b raised her descendants to manhood, she led forth the gods to be their rulers and teachers—the names of whom it is fitting to leave out in this instance, since we know them—and they equipped us to live, securing our daily existence by educating us in the basic arts, and preparing us to guard our country by teaching us the acquisition and use of weapons.

Having thus been born and educated, the ancestors of the men lying here lived in a regime they established, which it is correct
c to recall briefly. For it is the regime that nurtures human beings, a noble regime, good ones, the opposite, bad ones. Thus it is necessary to show that those who came before us were nurtured in a noble regime, on account of which they were good, as are men

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Athena, an olive tree. Zeus intervened to prevent the contest from becoming violent, and a divine court voted by a margin of one that Athena had given the better gift and that she should have Athens (Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato*, p. 95; Herodotus VIII.55).

[11] Compare Thucydides' more negative description of the original condition of the Attic land (I.2).

now, including these who have died. After all, the same regime existed then as now—an aristocracy, in which at present we live as citizens, as we have almost continually since then. Although one man calls her a democracy, another something else that pleases
d him, in truth she is an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude. For we have always had kings, sometimes by birth, at other times chosen.[12] And although the multitude has control over most of the city's affairs, they give the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently deemed to be best; and, unlike what happens in other cities, no one has ever been left out because of weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his father, nor has anyone ever been honored for the opposites. Rather, there is one standard: he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules. The
e cause of this, our regime, is its origin in equality. For the other cities have been constructed from all sorts of unequal human beings, with the result that their regimes—tyrannies and oligarchies—are also unequal. They live, therefore, regarding some as
239a slaves and others as masters. But since we and our people have all grown as brothers of one mother, we do not think it right to be slaves or masters of one another. Instead, our equality of birth, our natural equality, makes it necessary to seek equality under law, legal equality, and to yield to one another for no reason other than reputation for virtue and prudence.

It is because of this that the fathers of these men here and our fathers and these men themselves, having been raised in complete freedom and having grown up nobly, proved themselves before all human beings in many noble deeds, private and public.
b They performed these deeds out of the belief that it is necessary on behalf of freedom to fight both Greeks on behalf of other Greeks, and Barbarians on behalf of all the Greeks. How they defended themselves when Eumolpus and the Amazons and those still earlier were invading our country, and how they defended the Argives against the Cadmeians, and the Heracleidae against the Argives, our time is too brief to give the narration

[12] Socrates' remark here is not inaccurate, but it may be misleading. The power of the Athenian kingship had been severely limited since late in the eighth century. And it is likely that approximately 682 B.C. marked the final end of the hereditary kingship in Athens; at that time the position became an annual magistracy, reserved for presiding over religious matters. The position, however, retained the title *basileus* (king). (See Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 8; *Politics* 1273b-1274a; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks*, pp. 181-182; Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato*, p. 97).

deserved.[13] And besides, by having already beautifully sung of their virtue in music, the poets have made it known to all. If we
c were to try to honor the same deeds in bare speech, we would probably appear second-best. So, for these reasons, I think it best to pass over these deeds, considering also that they have received their due. But concerning those for which no poet has yet a worthy reputation for capturing their worth, those deeds which remain forgotten, I think we ought to recall them to memory by praising them and by encouraging others to set them down in odes and other poetry as befits the men who performed them. These are the deeds I shall speak of first.

d When the Persians were dominating Asia and attempting to enslave Europe, they encountered the descendants of this country, our progenitors whom it is just and fitting to remember first and to praise for their virtue. Now, in order to praise it finely, one must cast oneself back in thought to that time when all of Asia was already enslaved by the third King. The first of the Kings, Cyrus, freed his own countrymen, the Persians, and at the same time enslaved to
e his own will their masters, the Medes, and he became ruler of the rest of Asia as far as Egypt. His son then added Egypt and Libya, as much of them as he was able to traverse. The third, Darius, by foot extended the empire's boundary all the way to Scythia, and by ships controlled the sea and the islands. As a result, no one even
240a deemed himself a rival to him, and the minds of all human beings were enslaved. This is how the Persian empire reduced many great and warlike races to slavery.[14]

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[13] Socrates is speaking here of the legendary pre-history of Athens. The Greeks traditionally understood the Dorian invasions of the early second millennium B.C. as the return of the sons of Heracles (the Heracleidae) who were banished from Mycenae. According to legend, they returned to take their former homeland in the Peloponnesus with the help of the Athenians (Fine, *The Ancient Greeks*, p. 16; Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, pp. 84-85). The war with the Eleusinian king, Eumolpus, along with the Amazon invasion and the "defense" of the Argives, are the events surrounding Theseus' famous *synoecism*—his unification of the cities in Attica which took place in roughly the thirteenth century B.C. (Thucydides II.15; Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato*, p. 98; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 178).

[14] Socrates refers in this paragraph to the expansion of the Persian empire that took place under Cyrus the Great (550-530 B.C.), Cambyses (530-522 B.C.), and Darius I (522-485). For aiding the revolt of the Ionians in 499 B.C.—during which the Persians subjugated the Greek cities in Ionia, taking Miletus in 494 along with the islands of Chios, Lesbos, and Tenedos—Athens and Eretria were marked for punishment by Darius. Following the invasion of Thrace in 492, which extended Persian control to the northern border

Then Darius, accusing us and the Eretrians, on the pretext that we were plotting against Sardis, sent 500,000 men on transports and 300 war ships, and he told Datis, the commander, to return with Eretrians and Athenians in tow, if he should wish to keep
b his head. Sailing to Eretria against men who were among the most esteemed warriors of the Greeks of that time and who were not few in number, Datis subdued them in three days. In order that no one might escape, he searched through their entire country in the following manner: his soldiers, going to the Eretrian borders,
c spread out from sea to sea, joined hands, and went through the entire country so that they could say to the King that no one had eluded them.[15] With the same intention, they went down from Eretria to Marathon, believing themselves ready to yoke the Athenians with the Eretrians under this same necessity. When the former deeds were being done, and the latter being attempted, none of the Greeks came to the aid of either the Eretrians or the Athenians—except the Spartans, and they arrived the day after
d the battle; all the rest were panic-stricken and, embracing their present safety, kept quiet. Anyone who looks back to that time, then, would know what sort of men they were in virtue, they who met the power of the Barbarians at Marathon and punished the arrogance of all of Asia. The first to raise trophies over the Barbarians, they became leaders and teachers to others that the power of the Persians was not invincible but that any multitude
e of men and all wealth yields to virtue. And so I say that these men are fathers not only of our bodies but also of our freedom, ours and that of everyone on this continent. For looking to this deed even in later battles, the Greeks dared to run every risk in defense of their safety, having become students of those at Marathon.[16]

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of Thessaly, Darius set his sights on the mainland Greeks who had aided the Ionian revolt. See Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 4, pp. 349-435 and vol. 5, pp. 1-86, for a full history of this long period.

15 Eretria was besieged by the Persians in 490 B.C. The six-day siege ended when the city was betrayed from within. The Athenians sent military aid, but they were told upon their arrival that the situation was hopeless and that they should return to Athens. Herodotus records that all of the inhabitants were taken captive back to Persia (Herodotus VI.100-101). Herodotus does not mention the tactics described here, but Plato offers a similar account in the *Laws* 698c-699c (see also Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato,* p. 101; Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 5, pp. 43-47).

16 In the famous battle of Marathon a vastly outnumbered Athenian army successfully repelled an invading Persian force. According to Herodotus, the battle was extraordinarily one-sided; 6,400 Persians were killed, compared to only 192 Athenians (Herodotus VI.102-120). Socrates does

Thus, to the men who fought at Marathon, we must give the highest prize in our speech. But the second place must go to
241a those who fought and won the sea-battles around Salamis and at Artemisium.[17] About these men too, one would have many things to tell, both the kind of attacks they endured by land and by sea, and the way they fought off these attacks. But I shall recall to your memory what seems to me to have been the noblest of their deeds, since it advanced the work begun by those at Marathon. For those at Marathon proved to the Greeks only so much: that on land it
b was possible to fight off the Barbarians, even with few against many. But it was still unclear on the sea, where the Persians had the reputation of being invincible due to their numbers, wealth, skill, and strength. So this is why it is fitting to praise the men who fought the sea-battles at that time, because they dispelled the Greeks' second fear, relieving them of the fright inspired by a great number of ships and men. Hence, it came about that by
c both those who fought at Marathon and those who fought the sea-battles at Salamis, the rest of the Greeks were educated, learning from the former the lesson on land, from the latter the lesson at sea; they were trained not to fear the Barbarians.

Third, I declare, third both in order and in virtue in securing the safety of Greece, is the deed at Plataea, a common venture now of

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not mention the indirect but important influence of the Spartans on the battle. Although they were not present at the battle, the news that they were committing troops to the endeavor significantly raised the morale of the Athenians and induced the Persians to make the hasty and, ultimately ill-advised, strategic decision to divide their forces (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 5, pp. 47-73).

17 In the naval battle of Salamis (480 B.C.), an allied Greek fleet (roughly half Athenian) engaged and defeated a Persian fleet in the strait between Salamis and mainland Greece. Herodotus attributes the victory largely to the wiles of Themistocles, who incited the engagement by sending a messenger to the Persians with false reports of strife within the Greek fleet (Herodotus VIII.56-96; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 312-314; Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 5, 228-252). Not much is known about the details of the naval engagement at Artemisium that took place contemporaneously with the battle of Thermopylae. What is known is that an allied Greek fleet won a pyrrhic victory there against the Persian fleet (Herodotus VIII. 7-14, 18; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 303-4; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 5, pp. 208-215). We know from Thucydides (III.54) that Athenians and Spartans fought side by side in this engagement, although Socrates does not mention this.

Spartans and Athenians.[18] In fact, the threat all these men fought off was the greatest and most difficult, and for their virtue they are praised now by us, as they will be by future generations.

d But after this, many Greek cities were still siding with the Barbarian, and the King himself was reported to be planning another attack on the Greeks. It is just, then, that we recall also those who brought their predecessors' deeds to their conclusion of full safety by clearing away the whole Barbarian force and driving it off the sea. These were the men who fought the sea-battle at the Eurym-
e edon, who marched at Cyprus, and who sailed to Egypt and many other places.[19] It is right to remember and be grateful to them, for they frightened the King into turning his mind towards his own safety and away from plotting the destruction of the Greeks.

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18 A crucial victory over the Persian army was won at Plataea (479 B.C.). Socrates finally has mentioned the contribution of the Spartans to the defense of Greece. By all accounts Spartan valor contributed decisively to the victory. The Greeks showed no mercy to the defeated army; taking no prisoners, the Greeks slaughtered the Persian army to the last man. Only a small group escaped by land to Asia Minor (Herodotus IX.31-70; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 319-320). It is not clear whether the Spartans were principally responsible for the slaughter that ensued after the battle was decided (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 5, pp. 279-291).

19 Socrates is actually describing the events surrounding the Athenian expansion. The campaigns Socrates recounts (Eurymedon 469 B.C., Cyprus, and Egypt 459-454 B.C.) were conducted as much to justify the use of Delian League funds for the Athenian navy as out of fear of the Persians. The Delian League was initially formed by a group of Aegean islands led by Athens and guided by the common purpose of waging war on Persia, an endeavor of which the Spartans wanted no part (Thucydides I.96; Fine, 332). This was the beginning of the rift between the Spartan-led Hellenic League and the Athenian-led Delian League. The members of the Delian League were required to provide a given number of ships annually to the collective fleet. With increasing frequency, cash payments were made to Athens in lieu of providing ships and crews. The Athenians encouraged the policy of cash payments, and by the 440's only Lesbos, Chios, and Samos were providing their own ships. All the other members of the Delian League were in effect paying Athens for protection. At Eurymedon (469 B.C.) the Athenians fought and defeated a large force of Persians who were allegedly preparing to raid the Greek cities of the Ionian coast (Thucydides I.100; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 344; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 5, pp. 395-397). The Athenians moved into Cyprus, and from there to Egypt (Thucydides I.94, 104, 110, 112; Grote, *The Ancient Greeks,* vol. 5, pp. 408-419). The Egyptian campaign was a complete and costly failure. Thucydides writes of it : "Thus, the efforts of the Greeks came to nothing after six years of war" (Thucydides I.110).

This war against the Barbarians was endured by our whole city,
242a on our own behalf as well as on behalf of the rest who speak the same language. But when peace came and our city was honored, she became the object of that which human beings are prone to feel towards those who are successful: first emulation, and then, from emulation, envy. This pushed our city unwillingly into war with the Greeks.

After this war began, we engaged the Spartans at Tanagra fighting on behalf of Boeotian freedom.[20] And though the outcome
b of the battle was disputed, the subsequent deed decided it. For while the Spartans departed and left behind those whom they had come to aid, our own men, winning a victory on the third day in Oenophyta, justly restored those who had been unjustly banished. Now helping Greeks against Greeks on behalf of freedom, these were the first after the Persian war to become good men[21] and to
c free those whom they were helping. Honored by the city, they were the first to be laid to rest in this monument.

Later, once a larger war had broken out and all the Greeks had attacked and ravaged our country, repaying our city with such unworthy thanks, our men vanquished them in a sea-battle and seized their Spartan leaders at Sphacteria. Having it then in their power to destroy them, they nevertheless spared and returned
d them, and made peace.[22] They believed that whereas they ought to

[20] In the battle of Tanagra (457 B.C.), an army of Spartans, after completing a mission to quell Phocian hostilities, feared that the Athenians would attack them if they returned home across the Gulf of Corinth or through Megara, because both were guarded by the Athenians. A faction of Athenian oligarchs encouraged them to camp at Tanagra, which they did. The democratic Athenians, perceiving this as a threat, sent out a force which engaged and was defeated by the Spartans and their allies. Sixty-two days later, after the Spartans had fled for the Peloponnese, the Athenians attacked Tanagra, destroyed its fortifications, and took as hostages one hundred of the wealthiest people in the region. In Thucydides' account, the event seems far more like conquest than "liberation" (Thucydides I.108; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 5, pp. 413-414; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 354-5).

[21] See note 3 to our translation of Pericles' Funeral Oration.

[22] Socrates is speaking of an event that took place seven years into the Peloponnesian War. Sphacteria is an island near Pylos, where the Athenians decisively defeated a Peloponnesian fleet (425 B.C). This victory left the Spartans in the embarrassing situation of having an army stranded on the small island of Sphacteria and brought them to plead for an armistice. After a remarkable victory by Demosthenes and Cleon against the Spartan garrison on the island, the Spartans survivors surrendered and were brought to Athens (Thucydides IV.1-39; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 6, pp. 326-362;

wage war against the Barbarians all the way to destruction, they should fight those of their own race only to the point of victory, and should not let the anger of a single city destroy the community of the Greeks. It is certainly fitting to praise the men who fought in that war and lie here, because though some might try to claim that in the earlier war against the Barbarians there were others better than the Athenians, these men proved that this could not
e be true. For this time, prevailing in war in a Greece divided by rebellion and subduing the foremost of the other Greeks, they proved victorious on their own over those with whom they had once united to conquer the Barbarian.

After this peace came a third war, unexpected and terrible, in which many good men who now lie here died. Many of them sailed to regions around Sicily where they raised a great number
243a of trophies on behalf of the freedom of the Leontinians, whom they were helping in keeping with their oaths.[23] But when the length of their voyage became a problem for our city and left her unable to aid them, they gave up and fell into misfortune—these men of whom the very enemies that fought them received more praise for moderation and virtue than do the friends of other

Fine,*The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 478-80). Up to this point, the war had not been going well for the Athenians. Encouraged by their new success, they were impassive toward Spartan pleas for peace until they themselves met with defeat at Delium and Amphipolis. Only at that time were they willing to make a treaty involving the lifting of the siege on Sphacteria (Thucydides IV.1-39, V.14; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 478-80).

[23] In June of 415, the Athenians launched their famous and ill-fated campaign against Sicily, on the pretext of aiding certain Sicilian cities against others. Socrates speaks of this campaign as if it was distinct from the war with the Spartans, but by all accounts it was an almost seamless continuation of the Peloponnesian War. The expedition was plagued by problems of leadership. The Athenians sent three generals to Sicily: Lamachus, Alcibiades, and Nicias. Lamachus was killed in battle. As a result of agitation by his political enemies, Alcibiades was called back to Athens to stand trial for impiety. Perceiving that conditions in Athens at that time were highly unfavorable to him and that such a trial would surely mean his demise, Alcibiades fled to Sparta, where he treacherously informed the Spartans of the Athenians' designs in Sicily and strongly encouraged them to send military aid to Syracuse. These developments left in charge of the army only Nicias, who had had strong misgivings about the expedition at its inception and had joined it reluctantly. Demosthenes joined Nicias in the summer of 413, but the expedition came to a disastrous end in September when 40,000 Athenians surrendered to the Syracusians, who slaughtered thousands on the spot and worked the rest to death as quarry slaves (Thucydides Books VI-VII; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 491-97; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 6, pp. 204-372).

men.[24] Many others fought in the sea-battles at the Hellespont,
b seizing all the enemy's ships in one day and winning many other encounters.[25] I said there was something terrible and unexpected about the war: I meant that the rest of the Greeks came to desire victory over our city so much that they dared to make a treaty with our most hated enemy, the King, whom they and we in a common effort had expelled; in private they entreated him to return, a Barbarian against Greeks, and they assembled against
c our city all the Greeks and Barbarians.[26] Then, indeed, did the

[24] This is the literal sense of the Greek, if one takes *echein epainon* in the usual way ("to be praised") together with "enemies" and "friends", which are in the nominative. But the oddity of the suggestion that it is the Athenians' enemies who are being praised for their moderation and virtue, in the context, has prompted Stallbaum, and Graves following him, to take the lead of an accepted reading of *echein mempsin* ("to give blame") and thus translate the Greek along the lines of "these men, who received more praise for moderation and virtue from the very enemies who fought them than other men receive from their friends." See Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato*, p. 108.

[25] Socrates is referring to the Athenian victories at Cynossema, Cyzicus, and Abydos (411-410 B.C.). He overstates somewhat the degree of Athenian success in these engagements. The confrontation at Cynossema ended with both the Athenians and Spartans taking about equal losses in men and ships; it was a success insofar as it enabled the Athenians to sail through the Hellespont. This allowed them to recapture Cyzicus, a city that had revolted from the Athenians, and seize the eight ships docked there (Hammond, *A History of Greece,* p. 410). These victories were less important for strategic purposes than for morale. At Abydos, the Athenians defeated the Spartan admiral Mindarus, who was killed in the fighting, and destroyed or captured his entire fleet. In the wake of the disastrous defeat in Sicily, it showed that the Athenians were still capable of besting the Spartans at sea (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 8, pp. 97-107; Thucydides VIII.104-6).

[26] In 413 B.C. the Spartans and Persians began to collaborate against Athenian interests in Ionia. The Persians, intent on reclaiming the cities of Ionia, agreed to cover the military expenses of the Spartans if they in turn would aid the revolt in Chios. Both worked in conjunction to take the Ionian cities away from Athens. The agreement between them, known as the Treaty of Miletus (412 B.C.), was that all Greek colonies originally belonging to Persia would be returned to the Persian empire (Thucydides VIII.18). This treaty was made immediately after the Milesians, aided by the Spartans and by Alcibiades, revolted against and overthrew their pro-Athenian government. Contrary to Socrates' claims, though, the Spartans were hardly entreating the Persians to return to Greece, and the treaty did not last long. In the summer of 412, it was dissolved, as the Spartans expressed their fears that the agreement would allow the Persians to reclaim Thessaly and Boeotia and ultimately make the Persians masters of the Greeks (Thucydides VIII.37, 43; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 7, pp. 385-415; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 500).

might and virtue of our city become manifest. For although she was thought to be already worn down by war and although her ships were taken at Mytilene, men came to the rescue in sixty ships; these men, who embarked of their own accord, came to be acknowledged as best since they conquered their enemies and freed their friends, though, having obtained an unworthy fortune as they were not recovered from the sea, they now lie there.[27] It
d is right always to remember and praise them, for by their virtue we won not only that sea-battle but the rest of the war.

Indeed, because of them our city gained the reputation that it would never be overcome in war, not even by all humanity. And this proved true—we were vanquished not by others but by our own discord. Even now we remain undefeated by others, but we have conquered and defeated ourselves. After the fighting,
e when there was quiet and we were at peace with everyone else, we waged our own war at home in such a way that if in fact it should be fated for human beings to endure civil strife, no city would pray to suffer this disease differently.[28] For how readily and amicably did the citizens from the Piraeus and the town reconcile with one another and, contrary to expectations, with the other Greeks as well, and how equitably did they settle the war with

[27] This is a reference to the battle of Arginusae (406 B.C.), the largest naval engagement of the Peloponnesian War. Although the outcome was an Athenian victory, a severe storm prevented the Athenians from rescuing the crews of damaged ships and recovering the bodies of the dead for burial. Of the eight surviving generals, two refused to return to Athens, and the remaining six were placed on trial for what was perceived as an egregious neglect of duty—the failure to recover the bodies of the Athenian dead. They were found guilty and sentenced to death. Among the six was the younger Pericles, Aspasia's son. That the six generals were tried as a group was a clear transgression of Athenian legal procedures. For this reason, Socrates refused to take part in the trial, after strenuously urging the council to try them in strict accordance with legal procedure (*Apology* 32b-c; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 8, pp. 152-186; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 513-14. For further details of the trial see Xenophon's *Hellenica* I.7.1-35).

[28] In July of 404 B.C., Athenian oligarchs, supported by a show of force from the Spartan general Lysander, decreed that thirty men be elected to establish a constitution framed after the ancestral laws (Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 519). The Thirty limited the number of Athenian citizens to 3,000 and began a reign of terror that claimed 1,500 lives (Xenophon *Hellenica* II.3.11-21; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 520; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 8, pp. 204-249). A group of exiles led by Thrasybulus eventually regained power (Summer of 403) and remarkably exacted no reprisals from the former oligarchs, as they instituted a strictly-enforced amnesty.

244a those in Eleusis! There is no other explanation for all this than a true kinship, which secures, not in name but in fact, a friendship that is steady and of the same race. It is right to remember also those who died in this war at one another's hands, and, since we have become reconciled, to reconcile them as we are able, with prayers and sacrifices on occasions such as this, praying to those who rule over them. For not out of vice did they attack
b one another, nor out of enmity, but through misfortune. We, the living, ourselves bear witness to this, since we, who are of their race, have forgiven one another, both for what we did and for what we suffered.

After this, when we were completely at peace, our city kept quiet. She pardoned the Barbarians for retaliating fully when they were suffering badly at our hands, though she remained vexed at the Greeks, remembering that they had returned the favor of being
c well treated by our city by joining the Barbarians, taking away our ships, the very ones which once had saved them, and taking down a wall in return for the walls of theirs we had prevented from falling. Our city thus carried on, deciding never again to fight against the enslavement of Greeks either by one another or by Barbarians. As we were in this frame of mind, the Spartans believed that we had fallen as the allies of freedom and that it
d was now at hand for them to enslave the others, and they set out to do so.[29] But what need is there to speak at length about this? For I would be speaking neither of ancient men nor of things that happened long ago. Indeed, we ourselves know how the foremost of the Greeks—Argives, Boeotians, and Corinthians—came to our city in need, having been frightened out of their senses, and how, the most divine thing of all, even the King fell into such straits that he turned for protection to nowhere other than that very city
e he had so eagerly tried to destroy. In general, if someone should

[29] Socrates is now speaking of events that took place after his death in 399 B.C. Athens was not "completely at peace" during the period immediately following the Peloponnesian War. The absence of Athenian influence in the Aegean left a power vacuum that was quickly filled by the Spartans. A dispute over the control of the Ionian cities led to open conflict between the Spartans and Persians in 400. In the naval struggles that followed, many Athenian mercenaries joined the Persian fleet. As early as 396 Athens was unofficially sending crews and arms to the Persian fleet. Open hostility erupted with the Spartans in 395 when the Athenians intervened on behalf of the Thebans to prevent a Spartan invasion of Boeotia. This was the beginning of the Corinthian War, much of which took place on the isthmus between the Peloponnese and central Greece (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 9, pp. 346-361; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* pp. 542-548).

wish to accuse our city justly, only by saying this would he accuse correctly: that she is always too given to pity and a servant of the weak. Even in this instance, she was unable to be steadfast or to maintain her resolution no longer to help anyone who was enslaved against those who had done them an injustice; instead,
245a she bent and helped. She helped the Greeks herself and freed them from slavery, so that they were free until they enslaved themselves again. But she did not dare to help the King, being ashamed before the trophies at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea—although admittedly she saved him too by allowing fugitives and volunteers to help.

b After building walls and ships, and entering the war since she was forced to do so, our city fought the Spartans on behalf of the Parians.[30] But the King began to fear our city when he saw the Spartans giving up in the war at sea. He wanted to withdraw, and so, as a condition of allying with us and our other allies, he demanded the surrender of the Greeks on the Continent, the same ones the Spartans had previously given to him. He believed that we would be unwilling to accept this and that he would thus have
c a pretext for his withdrawal.[31] But he misjudged the other allies. For they were willing—the Corinthians, Argives, Boeotians, and the others agreed, swearing an oath that if the King were to give them money, they would hand over the Greeks on the Continent. We alone did not dare to give them up or to swear this oath. As you well know, the nobility and freedom of our city are this firm and sound, and we are by nature Barbarian-hating because, un-
d mixed with Barbarians, we are purely Greek. There live among us none of the descendants of Pelops, or Cadmus, or Egyptus, or Danaus, nor the many others who are Greeks by convention but Barbarians by nature. Rather, Greeks through and through, we live unmixed with Barbarians, which has given our city its

30 There is no known war on behalf of the Parians (Graves, *The "Euthyphro" and "Menexenus" of Plato,* p. 111). A number of editors have thus suggested alternative readings to "Parians," including "Persians" (Graves), "Corinthians" (Stallbaum), and "Argives" (Hermann).

31 The resurgence of Athenian military might have induced the Spartans to make peace with Persia (392 B.C). They agreed to return the islands that once belonged to Persia and to allow the other Greek cities to remain free and autonomous. The Athenians and Thebans were opposed to this arrangement—the Athenians feared they would lose their recent acquisitions (Scyros, Imbros, and Lemnos). No decision was reached, and the Corinthian War continued for five more years (Xenophon *Hellenica* IV.8.12-17; Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 9, pp. 413-415).

e pure hatred of foreign natures. So, since we were unwilling to perform the shameful and unholy act of giving away Greeks to Barbarians, we were once again deserted. Having fallen, then, into the same straits that had worn us down before, with the help of a god we brought the war to a better conclusion this time. For we escaped the war with our ships, our walls, and our colonies, since our enemies were glad to escape it as well.[32] Yet in this war
246a too we lost good men, the ones who met rough terrain at Corinth and treachery at Lechaeum. And good also were those men who freed the King and drove the Spartans from the sea.[33] I recall them to you, but it is fitting that you too praise and honor such men.

Thus, about the deeds of the men lying here and of all the others who have died on behalf of our city, many noble things have been said. But things still more numerous and more noble are left to
b be said; many days and nights would not be enough for one to cover everything. So it is right for every man who remembers their deeds to exhort the children of these men, just as in war, not to leave the post of their ancestors or fall back and yield to vice. And indeed, children of good men, I myself now exhort you, and
c whenever I meet one of you in the future, I shall remind you and urge you to strive eagerly to be as good as possible. But on this occasion, it is just that I tell you what your fathers, as they were about to risk their lives, solemnly enjoined us to announce, should anything happen to them, to those whom they would forever leave behind. I declare to you both what I heard straight from

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[32] A strong alliance was formed between Athens, Cyprus, and Egypt in 388 B.C. This concentration of power convinced the Persians that a friendly change of policy was needed toward Sparta. The Persians made a pact with the Spartans, and together they began to pressure the Athenians to accept the conditions of the treaty by effecting a complete blockade of the Hellespont and raiding the Attic coast. Upon accepting the terms of the treaty, the Athenians were allowed to keep Lemnos, Imbros, and Scyros. The accord went by several different names: the Peace of Antalcidas, the King's Peace, and the Common Peace (386 B.C.) (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 9, 432-438; Fine, *The Ancient Greeks,* p. 555).

[33] The treachery Socrates speaks of in the preceding sentence took place in 392 B.C. when the long walls leading from Corinth to Lechaeum on the Gulf of Corinth were betrayed by oligarchic sympathizers within Corinth (Hammond, *A History of Greece,* p. 459). This enabled the Spartans to establish fortifications in northern Corinthia. Those who "freed the King" were the Athenian mercenaries who fought in the Persian fleet. The most notable of these was Connon, who fought successfully against the Spartan fleet on many occasions; the most renowned of his victories was at Cnidos in 394 B.C. (Grote, *History of Greece,* vol. 9, pp. 342-345, 383-395).

them and, inferring from what they said then, what they would gladly say to you now if they had the power. But you ought to believe that what I am reporting, you are hearing straight from them. These are the things they said:

d "Children, that you are of good fathers, the present now testifies. Though we could have lived ignobly, we instead choose nobly to die, before bringing you and your descendants into disgrace and before shaming our fathers and all our ancestors. For we believe that life is not worth living for the one who brings shame upon his own, and that such a man will find no friend among either human beings or gods, neither on the earth nor under it once he has died. Hence, it is right that you remember our speech, and even if you should practice something else, practice it with vir-
e tue, knowing that without this all possessions and pursuits are shameful and base. For when coupled with unmanliness wealth does not bestow nobility upon its possessor: such a man is rich for another, not for himself. And beauty and strength of the body when joined with cowardice and vice do not appear seemly but unseemly, and they make the one who has them more conspicuous and reveal his cowardice. All knowledge, too, when severed
247a from justice and the rest of virtue, reveals itself as villainy, not wisdom. For these reasons, try to be zealous—first and last, in all things and in every way—such that in the best case you may exceed in renown both us and those who came before. But if you do not, if we surpass you in virtue, know that our victory brings us shame, whereas our defeat, should we be defeated, brings us happiness. What would be best, we would be defeated and you would be victorious if you should make sure that you do not
b abuse or squander the reputation of your ancestors, knowing that for a man who believes himself to be something, nothing is more shameful than to allow himself to be honored not for his own worth but for his ancestors' reputation. The honors of parents are a noble and magnificent treasure for their descendants, but to spend a treasure of money and honors, failing to pass it down to one's descendants due to a lack of possessions and a good reputation of one's own, is shameful and unmanly. If you live
c by what we have said, you will come to us as friends to friends when your own fate carries you off. But if you are neglectful and live basely, no one will welcome you favorably. To the children, then, let these things be said."

"As for our fathers and mothers, those of us who still have them ought always to urge them to bear as easily as possible whatever

calamity should occur, and we ought not to join them in lamenting. They will not be in need of added grief as this misfortune will provide grief enough. Rather, healing and soothing them, we ought to remind them that of those things for which they prayed, the gods have given ear to the greatest. After all, they prayed not that their children become immortal, but that they become good and illustrious, and these, which are the greatest of goods, they obtained. For a mortal man, though, it is not easy for everything in his life to turn out as he intends. And yet by bearing the calamities courageously, they will be thought truly to be fathers of courageous children and themselves such as well; by yielding to their grief, however, they will arouse a suspicion either that they are not our fathers or that those who praise us lie. Neither of these suspicions ought to be aroused, but they most of all must praise us with deeds, showing themselves to be truly men who are fathers of men. The old saying "Nothing too much" certainly seems to be nobly said, and it is in fact well said. For if a man depends on himself for everything or nearly everything that brings happiness and does not depend on other human beings, upon whose doing well or badly his own fortunes would be compelled to wander, he is the one who is best prepared to live. This man is the moderate one, and so also the courageous and prudent one. When his wealth and children come into being and perish, then most of all will this man obey the proverb, for since he relies on himself, he will be found neither taking joy nor grieving too much. We, for our part, esteem such men and wish and declare our own kin to be of this sort; and we now present ourselves as such too, not being excessively distressed or afraid if we must meet our end in the present circumstances. Indeed, we ask both our fathers and our mothers to spend the rest of their lives possessed of this same mind and to know that they will gratify us most neither by wailing nor by mourning over us. Rather, if there is any perception of the living by the dead, they would gratify us least by treating themselves badly and bearing the calamity grievously, and most by mourning lightly and with measure. As for our own lives, they have already come to an end, the very end which is noblest for human beings, so it is more fitting to honor what we have done than to mourn. And by caring for and nurturing our wives and children, turning their attention there, not only would our parents best be able to forget our fortune, but they would live more nobly and correctly, and would show us greater love. This is a sufficient message, then, from us to our families."

"To the city, we would make the exhortation that they take care of our parents and sons, giving the ones a well-ordered education and nursing the others properly in their old age. But of course we know that even without our making this exhortation, the city will take adequate care."

These are the messages, children and parents of those who have
e died, that these men solemnly enjoined us to relay, and I relay them as zealously as I can. And I myself, on their behalf, beseech you, the children, that you imitate your fathers; the parents, that you be heartened about your own welfare, since we will nurse you in your old age and care for you privately and publicly, whenever any of us happens to meet any of you. Of the care provided by the city, you yourselves surely know that the city makes laws regarding the children and parents of those who have died, and that to keep their fathers and mothers from being wronged, it
249a has been ordered by the greatest authority that they be watched over more than the rest of the citizens. As for the children, the city herself shares in their rearing, eager that their orphanhood hardly be noticed by them, and she makes herself into the figure of a father while they are still young. When they reach manhood, she exhibits and recalls the pursuits of their fathers by providing the instruments of their patrimonial virtue and sends them forth to their inheritance arrayed in full armor; she sends them, under
b the grace of an omen, to begin ruling in the house of their fathers, ruling with strength since they have been adorned with weapons. And she never fails to honor those who have died, each year performing in common for all those customary rites performed also in private for each. In addition to this, she establishes every manner of gymnastic, equestrian, and musical contest, and since fate has
c cast her without design into the role of an heir and a son to those who have died—into a father to their sons and a guardian to their parents—our city takes complete care of all at all times. Taking these things to heart, you ought to bear the calamity more gently, for by doing so you would most endear yourself to the dead as well as to the living, and you would most easily heal others and be healed yourselves.

But now that you and all the others have completed the public lament of the dead, as is the law, depart."

d There you have it, Menexenus, the speech of Aspasia the Milesian.

Menexenus. By Zeus, Socrates, this Aspasia you speak of must be blessed if, though a woman, she is able to compose such a speech.

Socrates. But if you don't believe me, come along with me, and you can hear her speaking.

Menexenus. I have run across Aspasia many times, Socrates, and I know what sort she is.

Socrates. What then? Don't you admire her, and aren't you now grateful to her for the speech?

Menexenus. Very much so, Socrates. I'm very grateful to her or to
e whoever else told you this speech. And most of all I'm grateful to the one who recited it.

Socrates. Fine. But make sure that you don't report me, so that I may continue to relay to you her many fine political speeches.

Menexenus. Be assured, I won't report you. Just relay them.

Socrates. This shall be done.